

Week Ending Friday, January 12, 1996

The President's Radio Address

January 6, 1996

Good morning. Today I want to talk with you about the great debate on the budget. This debate is not just about abstract numbers, and it certainly goes far beyond party politics as usual. It is instead about vital principles and momentous issues for our country. We're addressing profound questions about what kind of country we are and what kind of country we're going to be, about what we owe to each other and what we owe to our children and to America's future.

These questions have dominated our politics for quite a long time now. And now it is decision time, time to move beyond arguments and come to conclusions.

For 3 weeks, the Federal Government has been shut down because Republicans in Congress refused to enact legislation to keep it open. This shutdown has had a real and unfortunate impact on the lives of millions of Americans. Now, I'm pleased to report that Congress has acted to bring Government employees back to work and to reopen most services to the public. This sets the stage for constructive, honest, and focused discussions on how to balance the budget while remaining true to our values and true to our future.

America is at a crossroads. One path leads to continual partisan conflict, where nothing is ever really resolved and each decision simply sets the stage for the next fight. The other path leads to national unity, a unity built on true solutions and real common ground. Down this path lies progress and strength that has always been the right path for America.

So I appeal to the Congress and to members of both parties to put aside partisanship and work to craft a balanced budget agreement that upholds our values and reflects the common ground the American people have decided upon.

You know, we've been talking about the budget for months. The American people have heard our deeply held views, and we've had time to listen to theirs. I believe there is an overwhelming consensus on a course that is also the right course for America: a balanced budget in 7 years, because it's wrong to leave a legacy of debt to our children; a budget that protects Medicare and Medicaid, because we owe a duty to our parents, to the disabled, and to our poorest children; a balanced budget that protects education and the environment, because we owe a duty to our children and to future generations; and a balanced budget that doesn't single out the hardest pressed working families for higher taxes.

The American people have decided that it is better for people to work than be on welfare, that welfare should be a temporary help, not a way of life, but that the solution should support children and families, not undermine them. Americans have decided they want a smaller Government that is less bureaucratic and more creative, that serves them as well or better with less money, and that there should be a tax cut that promotes educational opportunity and strengthens the ability of families to care for their children.

Now we can achieve these goals. We can balance the budget while remaining true to these values. This is a great challenge but not the greatest one we have faced. It is not the financial numbers that are blocking our progress. It is political ideology. It is time now to do what our parents have done before us, to put the national interests above narrow interests.

Later today, I will be meeting for several hours with the Republican and Democratic leaders of the House and the Senate. Over the past 2 weeks, we have had serious, detailed, constructive discussions about all the issues before us: Medicare, Medicaid, education, the environment, taxes, and spending.

I know that if we work together and embrace the possibility for a true national unity, we can reach an agreement to balance the budget that you will be proud of and that will be good for America. And that's what I am determined to do.

This is a moment of great progress and great promise for our country. Many of us hold very strong views about how best to seize that moment. But above all else, now is the time to find common ground, for taking the best that each side has to offer and fashioning a sensible solution. That's the American way. And that is what will get us to the right kind of balanced budget.

This budget debate has been difficult, demanding, and not always pretty. But remember, democracy is raucous and often full of debate that is not always pretty. But our country is still the world's greatest democracy, a beacon of peace and freedom for the world.

I ask for the help of every American so that we can build an even greater future for our children.

Thanks for listening.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:06 a.m. from the Oval Office at the White House.

Statement on Signing the Sixth Continuing Resolution

January 6, 1996

Last night, I signed into law H.R. 1643, the Sixth Continuing Resolution for fiscal 1996, which puts all Federal workers back on the job with pay from December 16 until January 26 and also funds a limited number of Federal activities until September 30, 1996.

This bill is a step in the right direction—but only a step. It does not end the partial shutdown of the Federal Government that continues to seriously impair the activities of the Departments of Commerce, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, State, and Veterans Affairs; the Environmental Protection Agency; the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; the Small Business Administration; and many smaller agencies.

Most importantly, H.R. 1643 enables Federal workers to return to the job and to be paid—both the 480,000 who have been working without pay and the 280,000 furloughed workers.

The bill also funds a limited number of Federal functions for the rest of fiscal 1996. They include nutrition services for the elderly; grants to States for child welfare services; Federal Parent Locator Service activities; State unemployment insurance administration activities; general welfare assistance payments and foster care payments to Indians; the Federal subsidy to the rail industry pension and certain other expenses of the Railroad Retirement Board; visitor services of the National Park System, National Wildlife Refuges, National Forests, Smithsonian Institution, National Gallery of Art, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and United States Holocaust Memorial; and State Department visa, passport, and U.S. citizen services. In addition, family support payments to States and payments to States for foster care and adoption assistance are provided through March 15, 1996.

The bill ensures, through September 30, 1996, benefit payments to about 3.3 million veterans and their survivors. It also provides for payments to contractors of the Veterans Health Administration for services related to the health and safety of patients in Veterans Affairs medical facilities.

The measure provides authority for the District of Columbia to continue full operations, using District funds, through September 30, thereby extending the authority provided by the Fifth Continuing Resolution for fiscal 1996, which expires January 25. Regrettably, the measure contains an objectionable provision that would single out poor women by prohibiting the use of District funds for providing abortion services. I oppose including this provision in the regular fiscal 1996 District of Columbia appropriations bill, and I urge the Congress to send that bill to me—in a form I can sign—as soon as possible.

The measure also provides for reimbursement to States for State funds used to implement Federal programs and to pay furloughed State employees whose compensation is advanced or reimbursed, in whole or in part, by the Federal Government during